

Sūrah 99

Al-Zilzāl

(The Earthquake)

(Madinan Period)

Title

The *Sūrah*'s title is derived from its opening word, *zilzālahā* (the earthquake).

Period of Revelation

Opinions differ as to whether this is a Makkan or Madinan *Sūrah*. According to Ibn Mas'ūd, 'Aṭā', Jābir and Mujāhid, it is Makkan. This stance is supported by one report on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās. As opposed to this, Qatādah and Muqātil speak of it as Madinan and cite another report attributed to Ibn 'Abbās in their support. Abū Sa'īd Khudrī's report, cited by Ibn Abī Ḥātim, is also adduced in order to designate it as Madinan. Abū Sa'īd Khudrī states that as Verses 7-8 of this *Sūrah* were recited he asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) whether he could see his deeds, including major sins. To this the latter replied in the affirmative. Upon this he exclaimed: "Woe on me!" However the Prophet (peace be upon him) reassured him, pointing out that each of his good

deeds would be equal to ten good deeds. Since Abū Sa‘īd Khudrī was a Madīnan and had come of age after the Battle of Uhud, this *Sūrah* is dated as Madīnan in view of this report. However, we have already explained how the Companions and Successors talked about the circumstantial setting of Qur’ānic verses and *Sūrahs*. Their statements on this count are not to be taken at face value for dating. It is likely that after coming of age when Abū Sa‘īd Khudrī heard this *Sūrah* for the first time from the Prophet (peace be upon him), he may have made the above query, expressing his fear. In his report, however, the same is narrated in such a way that he posed these questions when this *Sūrah* was revealed.

In terms of its content and style, this *Sūrah* is unmistakably Makkān of the early period when the articles of Islamic faith were articulated for better appreciation by those living there.

Subject Matter and Themes

Life-after-Death is this *Sūrah*’s main concern. On this count, it makes special mention of man’s deeds, which will be laid bare on the Day of Judgement. Verses 1-3 relate how the Next Life will be caused by Allah, which will bewilder man. In his life, man did what pleased him, without ever thinking that even insensate objects would testify against him. The earth will declare, by Allah’s command, all that man has done. On that Day, people will come out of their graves in throngs and their record of deeds will be given to them. These will be accurate and exhaustive records, leaving out no good or bad deed committed by anyone.